

Vol. 531 Rs. 25

Karna

Amar Chitra Katha: the Glorious Heritage of India



Karna

The Mahabharata is a gallery of heroes and Karna is the most heroic of them. Fate denied him all his dues. But he fought and achieved all that a man could aspire to have.

He was as much a Pandava prince as any of the other five. But he never knew his lineage. At last when he knew it, he could not but disown it.

He was brought up as a commoner and therefore humiliated. Teachers would not teach him. His equals shunned him. He received no honour despite his valour but he never lost heart. Duryodhana, the Kaurava prince, offered him kingship. For this act of kindness, he remained loyal to Duryodhana till the very end.

Script: Kamala Chandrakant

Artworks: Ram Waeerkar

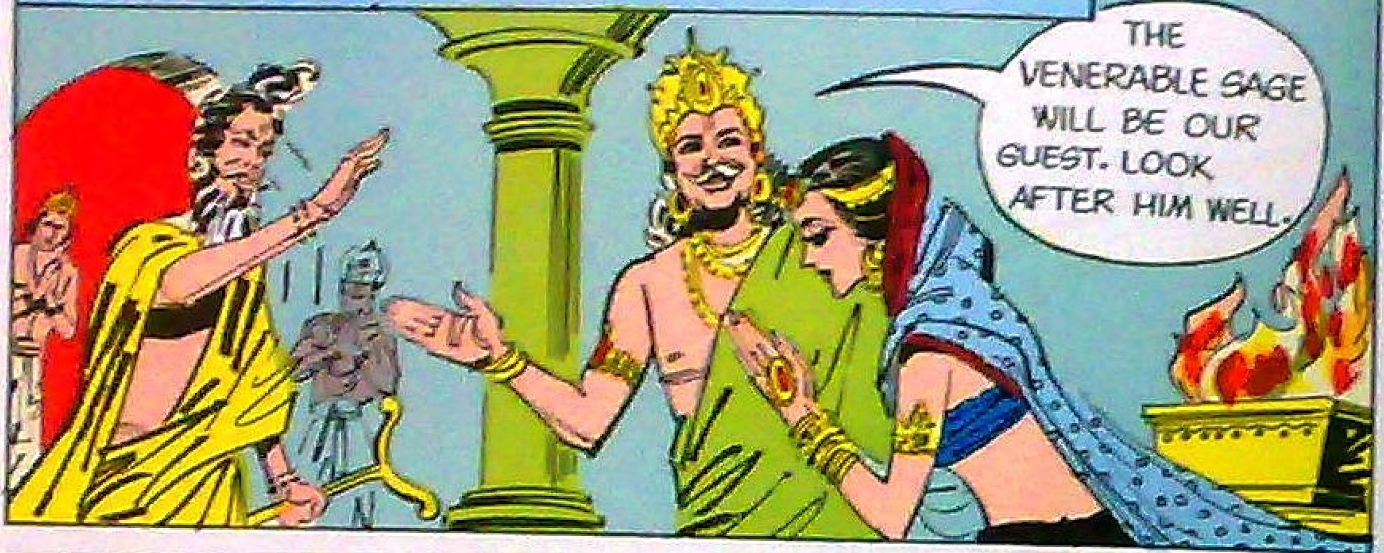
***Editor* : Anant Pai**

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Karna


RAJA KUNTIBHOJA, OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS YADAVA RACE, HAD NO CHILDREN. SO HE ADOPTED PRITHA, HIS NIECE, AND CALLED HER KUNTI.


ONE DAY SAGE DURVASA, FEARED FOR HIS VIOLENT TEMPER AND HARD TO PLEASE, VISITED RAJA KUNTIBHOJA.
THE VENERABLE SAGE WILL BE OUR GUEST. LOOK AFTER HIM WELL.


FOR A FULL YEAR KUNTI LOOKED AFTER THE SAGE CAREFULLY, PATIENTLY AND WITH DEVOTION.
I AM GLAD THE YEAR IS ALMOST COME TO AN END WITHOUT A MISHAP.


AND DURVASA WAS WELL PLEASED.
I WILL GIVE YOU A DIVINE MANTRA*. IT WILL ENABLE YOU TO CALL UPON ANY GOD TO COME AND BLESS YOU WITH A SON WHO IS IN EVERY WAY HIS EQUAL.
* A WORD OR WORDS OF POWER.





BUT SURYA COULD NOT GO, AS THE SPELL OF THE MANTRA HELD HIM. AND **KARNA** WAS BORN, WITH THE [1]KAVACHA AND THE [2]KUNDALAS – A GIFT FROM HIS DIVINE FATHER [3]SURYA.

[1] ARMOUR
[2] EAR-RINGS
[3] THE SUN-GOD

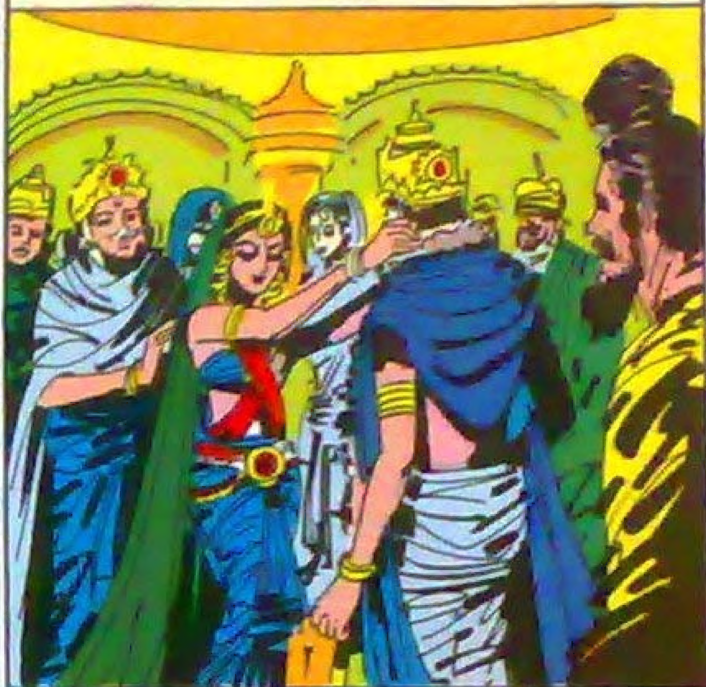

AH! DEAR SON, FORGIVE ME. IF I EVER SEE YOU AGAIN, WILL I HAVE THE STRENGTH TO ACKNOWLEDGE YOU THEN?

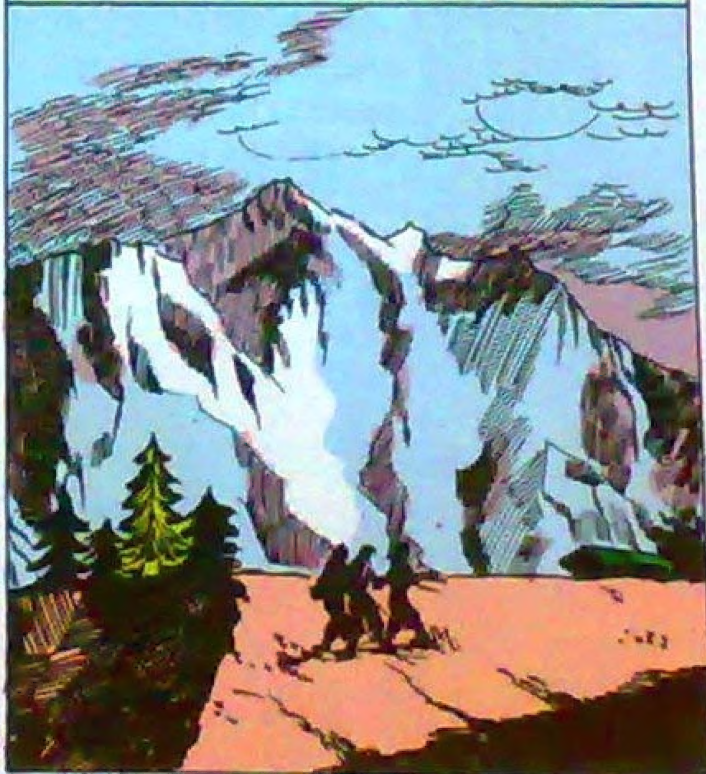

FURTHER DOWN THE RIVER A CHILDLESS CHARIOTEER ADHIRATHA SAW THE BASKET AND LOOKED INTO IT.


AH! WHAT A BEAUTIFUL CHILD, ABANDONED BY SOME HEARTLESS MOTHER, NO DOUBT.


HE TOOK THE CHILD HOME TO HIS WIFE, RADHA.
LET US CALL HIM VASUSHENA OF THE KAVACHA AND KUNDALAS.
HE SHALL BE RADHEYA, DEAR WIFE - RADHEYA THE SON OF RADHA.


KARNA'S EARLY CHILDHOOD WAS A HAPPY ONE.


KUNTI MEANWHILE HAD MARRIED KING PANDU OF HASTINAPURA, WHO RULED THE KINGDOM FOR HIS BLIND BROTHER DHRITARASHTRA.


BUT KING PANDU BECAUSE OF A CURSE COULD NOT HAVE CHILDREN. SO HE RETIRED WITH HIS TWO QUEENS, KUNTI AND MADRI, TO A QUIET LIFE IN THE HIMALAYAS.


BUT ONE DAY—
DEAREST ONE, HOW I SORROW WHEN I SEE YOUR CHILDLESS STATE!
DO NOT GRIEVE, MY LORD. I KNOW OF A WAY OUT BUT I HAVE NOT TOLD YOU ABOUT IT.

WITH THE HELP OF THE MANTRA, KUNTI AND MADRI HAD FIVE SONS IN ALL – THE PANDAVA PRINCES.

WHEN PANDU DIED, MADRI BURNT HERSELF ON THE FUNERAL PYRE. KUNTI TOOK THE FIVE PRINCES, YUDHISHTHIRA (SON OF DHARMA), BHEEMA (SON OF VAYU), ARJUNA (SON OF INDRA), NAKULA AND SAHADEVA (SONS OF THE ASVINI TWINS), TO HASTINAPURA.

REVERED UNCLE BHEESHMA, AND WISE VIDURA, I LEAVE THE FATHERLESS SONS OF PANDU IN YOUR CARE.

THE PANDAVA PRINCES SHALL BE BROUGHT UP, AS THE HEIRS OF PANDU, ALONG WITH THEIR COUSINS THE KAURAVAS.

FROM THE BEGINNING A BITTER RIVALRY SPRANG UP BETWEEN THE COUSINS. THE KAURAVA PRINCES WERE UNHAPPY.



AND KARNA WHO OFTEN CAME TO HASTINAPURA WATCHED.

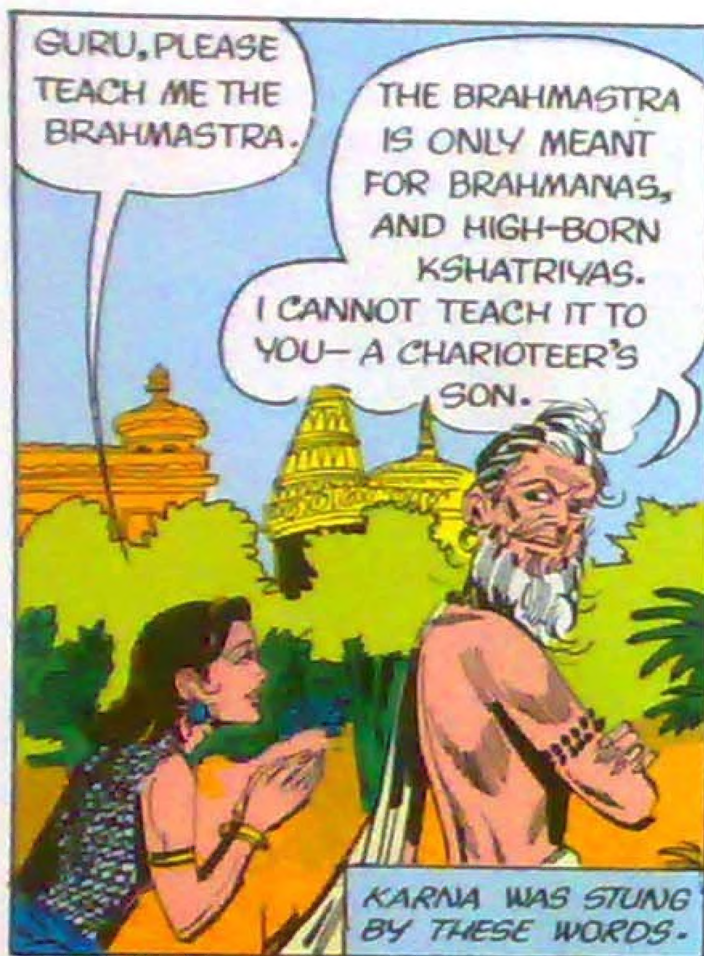


DRONACHARYA, MASTER IN THE PRINCELY ARTS, TAUGHT THE PRINCES.



KARNA TOO BECAME HIS PUPIL. BUT–



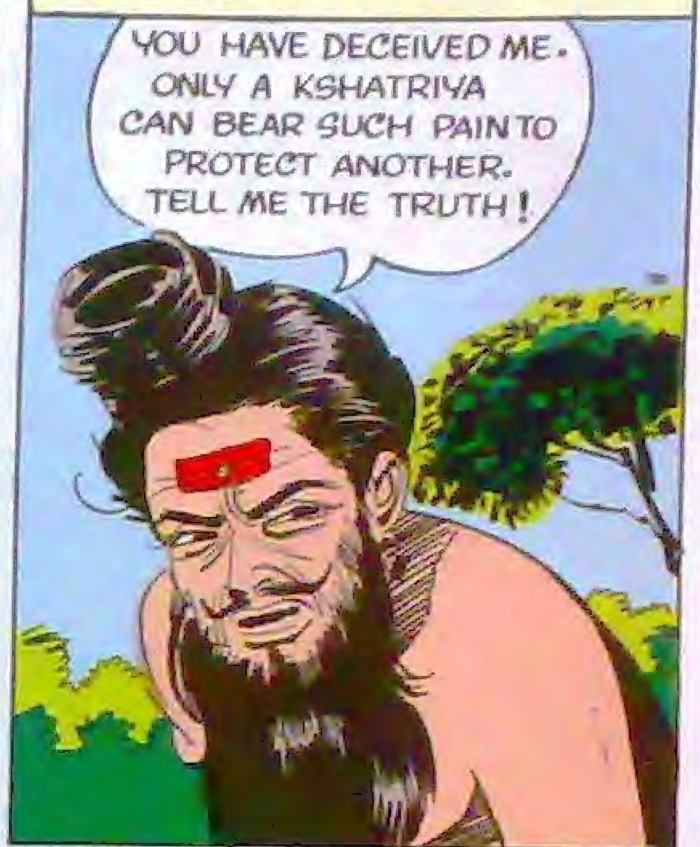

GURU, PLEASE TEACH ME THE BRAHMASTRA.
THE BRAHMASTRA IS ONLY MEANT FOR BRAHMANAS, AND HIGH-BORN KSHATRIYAS. I CANNOT TEACH IT TO YOU– A CHARIOTEER'S SON.
KARNA WAS STUNG BY THESE WORDS.


PARASHURAMA, THEY SAY, HATES KSHATRIYAS. I WILL GO TO HIM IN THE GUISE OF A BRAHMAN. HE IS SURE TO ACCEPT ME AS HIS PUPIL.

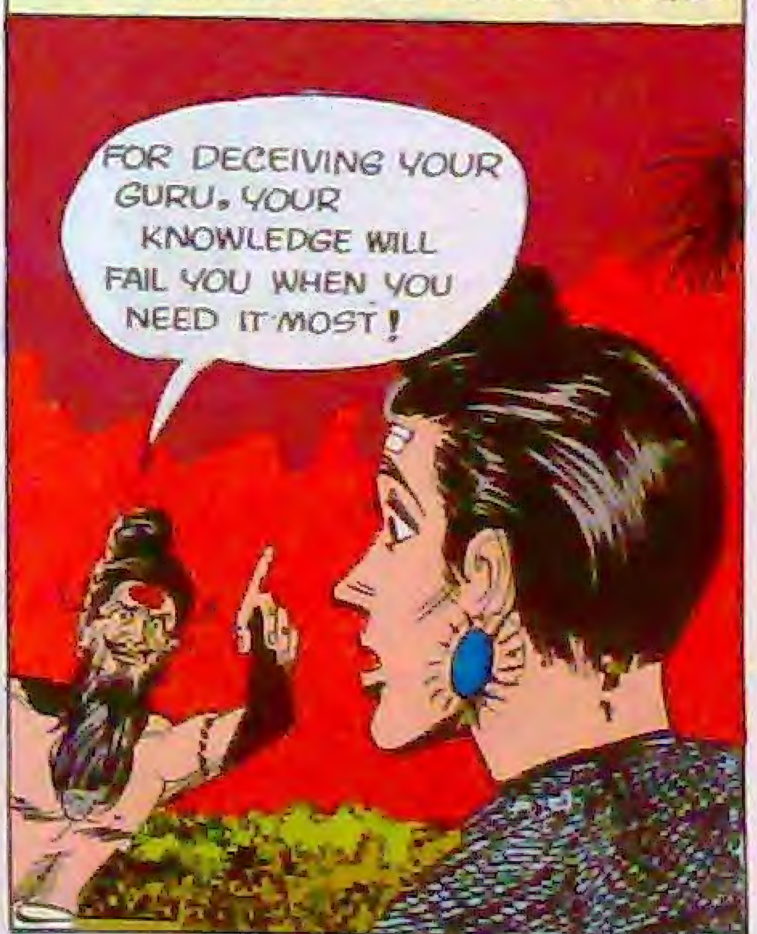

WHEN HE REACHED THE ASHRAM OF THE GREAT SAGE —
I AM A BRAHMAN LAD. PLEASE ACCEPT ME AS YOUR PUPIL.
COME, MY SON. I AM WILLING TO TEACH ANY WORTHY YOUTH, WHO IS NOT A KSHATRIYA.
KARNA COULD NOT HELP THIS DECEPTION.


PARASHURAMA WAS VERY FOND OF HIS BRIGHT PUPIL.
YOU ARE NOW READY FOR THE MASTER WEAPON –THE BRAHMASTRA.


THEN ONE DAY WHILE PARASHURAMA WAS RESTING WITH HIS HEAD ON KARNA'S LAP –
AH! HOW THE LITTLE INSECT STINGS. BUT I WILL NOT DISTURB YOUR REST, BELOVED MASTER. SLEEP ON.
AND THE WOUND BLED BUT KARNA DID NOT STIR.


WHEN THE SAGE WOKE UP AND SAW THE BLOOD –
YOU HAVE DECEIVED ME. ONLY A KSHATRIYA CAN BEAR SUCH PAIN TO PROTECT ANOTHER. TELL ME THE TRUTH!


KARNA CONFESSED.
I AM THE SON OF ADHIRATHA, THE CHARIOTEER, A SUTAPUTRA. FORGIVE ME, SIR.


THE ENRAGED SAGE CURSED KARNA.
FOR DECEIVING YOUR GURU, YOUR KNOWLEDGE WILL FAIL YOU WHEN YOU NEED IT MOST!

AS HE WALKED AWAY, THE TOTALLY DEJECTED KARNA HARDLY KNEW WHERE HE WAS GOING.



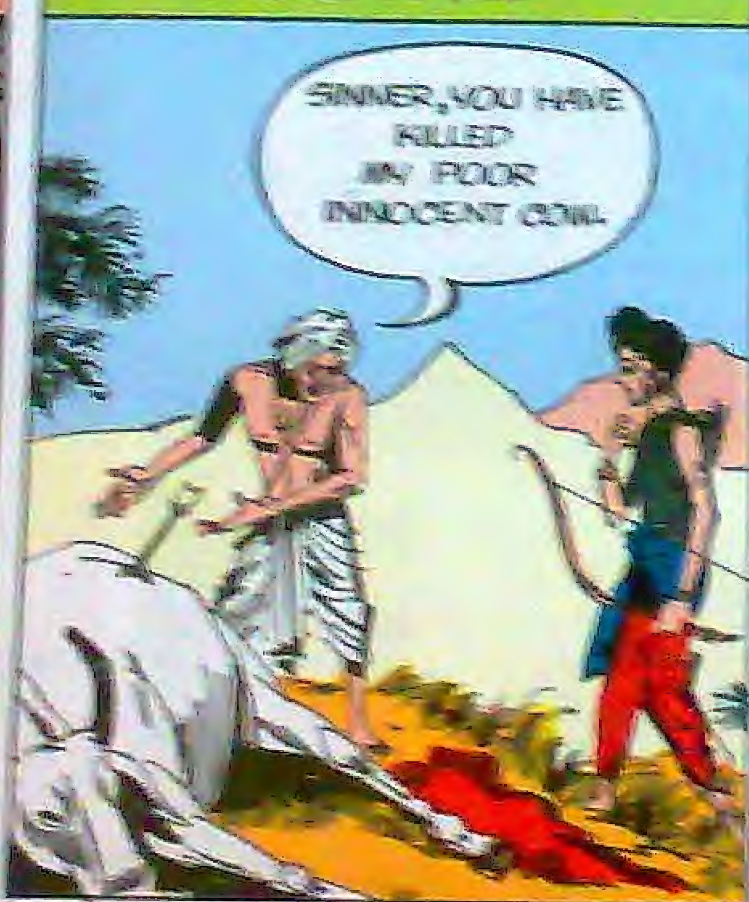
SUDDENLY AN ANIMAL RUSHED PAST AND WITHOUT THINKING HE DREW HIS BOW AND KILLED IT.



AS HE WALKED TOWARDS THE DEAD ANIMAL –



A BRAHMAN RAVED ANGRILY AT HIM.



IGNORING KARNA'S ATTEMPTS TO EXPLAIN, THE BRAHMAN CURSED HIM.

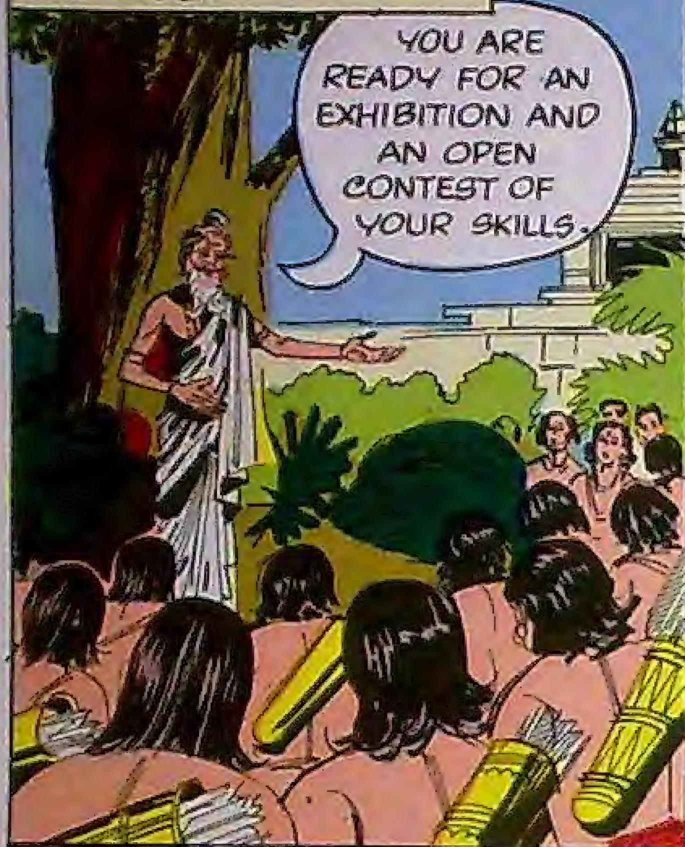
YOU TOO WILL BE KILLED WHEN YOU ARE HELPLESS TO DEFEND YOURSELF - EVEN AS YOU KILLED AN HELPLESS COW.

KARNA SADLY RETURNED TO THE ONE PERSON WHO KNEW AND LOVED HIM—HIS MOTHER.

IT SEEMS AS IF FATE IS AGAINST ME - I WONDER WHAT FURTHER HUMILIATIONS SHE HAS IN STORE FOR ME -

HE STAYED WITH HER A FEW DAYS. THEN ONE DAY —

MOTHER, I HEAR THAT AN OPEN TOURNAMENT IS TO BE HELD AT HASTINA-PURA. I WILL COMPETE - A VALIANT WARRIOR WILL FIND HIS PLACE AMONG THE VALIANT.





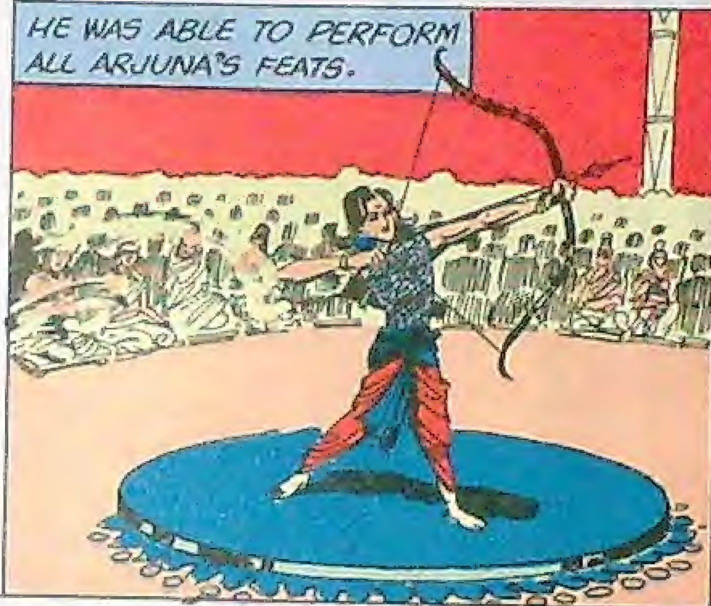
WITH HIS SPLENDID FEATS ARJUNA WAS EASILY THE CHAMPION OF THE DAY.

SUDDENLY THERE WAS A COMMOTION AND ALL EYES WERE TURNED TOWARDS THE ENTRANCE. A FIGURE ENTERED ON THE SCENE— IT WAS **KARNA**.





HE WAS ABLE TO PERFORM ALL ARJUNA'S FEATS.










WELCOME, O VALIANT ONE! IT IS OUR GOOD FORTUNE THAT YOU ARE HERE TODAY. WHAT SHALL BE YOUR REWARD?


KARNA WAS OVERWHELMED BY THIS WELCOME FROM DURYODHANA.
GOOD KING ALL I ASK IS YOUR LOVE AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET DRONA'S FAVOURITE PUPIL ARJUNA IN SINGLE COMBAT!
IT SHALL BE DONE!


AS ARJUNA WAS GETTING READY, KRIPA, A TEACHER IN THE KURU PALACE, STEPPED FORWARD.
WHO ARE YOU? REVEAL YOUR PARENTAGE. OUR PRINCE MAY FIGHT ONLY WITH HIS EQUAL IN BIRTH AND STATUS.


MY GLORY WAS SHORT-LIVED. HOW SHALL I ANSWER HIM? O HEARTLESS MOTHER WHO ABANDONED ME AT BIRTH, WHO AM I?


THE NOBLE DURYODHANA CAME TO HIS RESCUE.
I CROWN KARNA PRINCE OF ANGA.


JUST THEN ADHIRATHA WALKED FEEBLY TO-WARDS THE STAGE.
MY SON! MY BLESSINGS!


BHEEMA SUDDENLY ROARED WITH AMUSEMENT.
GO SUTAPUTRA! GO DRIVE YOUR CHARIOT! YOU ARE NOT WORTHY OF DEATH AT ARJUNA'S HANDS.


DURYODHANA COULD HARDLY CONTAIN HIS ANGER AS HE LED KARNA AWAY FROM THE HUMI-LIATING SCENE.
COME KARNA! IT TAKES A HERO TO RECOGNISE A HERO!

AS THEY DROVE AWAY IN DURYODHANA'S CHARIOT–

IT IS STRANGE! I FEEL SAFE FROM THE PANDAVAS, ALREADY. WHAT POWER DOES THIS KARNA HAVE THAT MAKES ME FEEL SO?

DURYODHANA YOU HAVE NOT BEFRIENDED ME IN VAIN. I WILL KILL ARJUNA IN SINGLE COMBAT ONE DAY! I WILL!

AS THE YEARS PASSED, RELATIONS BETWEEN THE COUSINS ONLY WORSENED. KARNA, IMPELLED BY HIS LOVE FOR DURYODHANA, BLINDLY TOOK HIS SIDE. YUDHISHTHIRA WAS CHEATED AT A GAME OF DICE, DEPRIVED OF HIS KINGDOM AND BANISHED FOR THIRTEEN YEARS, WITH HIS BROTHERS AND QUEEN DRAUPADI. AT THE END OF THE PERIOD THE PANDAVAS OPTED FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT. BUT DURYODHANA, ENCOURAGED BY KARNA, AND AGAINST THE WISHES OF HIS ELDERS, REFUSED TO NEGOTIATE. IF THE PANDAVAS WANTED THEIR KINGDOM THEY WOULD HAVE TO FIGHT FOR IT.


IN THE HEAVENS INDRA WAS CONCERNED ABOUT ARJUNA...
IF KARNA IS DEPRIVED OF HIS KAVACHA AND KUNDALAS, MY SON ARJUNA NEED FEAR NO MORTAL!


...AND SURYA ABOUT KARNA.
IF INDRA INTERVENES, MY SON HAS NO CHANCE. I MUST WARN KARNA.


SURYA TRIED TO WARN HIS SON IN A DREAM.
LORD INDRA WILL TRY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOUR GENEROSITY. DO NOT PART WITH YOUR KAVACHA AND KUNDALAS


INDRA APPROACHED KARNA IN THE GUISE OF A BRAHMAN.
I BEG FOR ALMS. KARNA, IT IS SAID, REFUSES NOTHING TO THOSE WHO ASK. I WANT YOUR KAVACHA AND KUNDALAS.

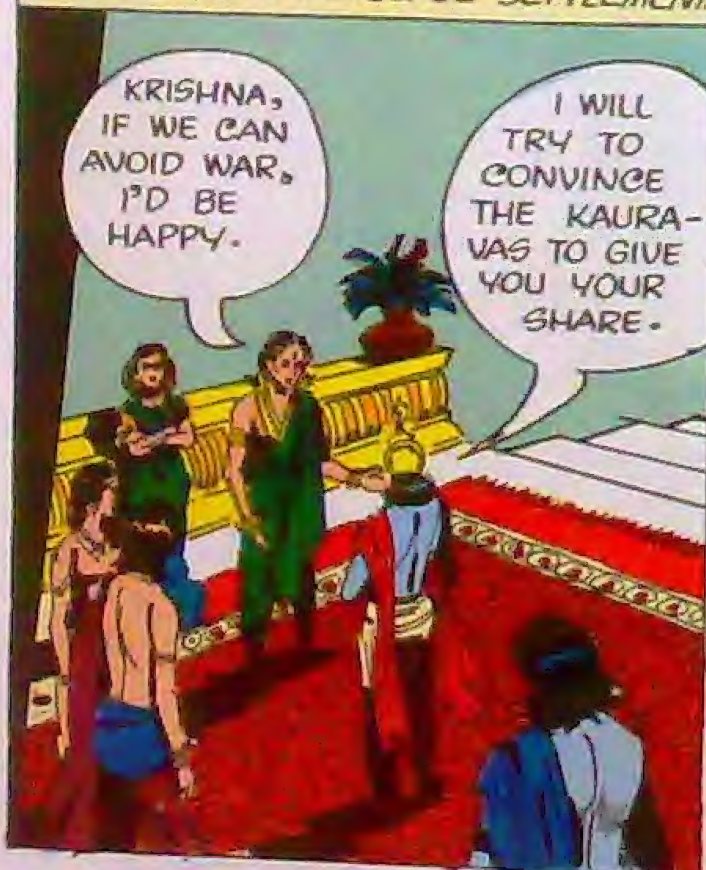
DESPITE SURYA'S WARNINGS, KARNA, THE GENEROUS, PARTED WITH THE KAVACHA AND KUNDALAS.



INDRA WAS TOUCHED.



THE PANDAVAS MEANWHILE STILL HOPED FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT.



KRISHNA WENT TO HASTINAPURA. BUT –




KRISHNA WENT TO KARNA AND TOLD HIM THE STORY OF HIS BIRTH. WHEN HE FINISHED —
COME WITH ME. I WILL MAKE YOU A GREAT EMPEROR. YOU WILL HAVE FIVE POWERFUL BROTHERS AND A MOTHER WHO LONGS FOR YOU.


KARNA WAS IN A TERRIBLE PREDICAMENT.
DURYODHANA'S LOVE IS WHAT I VALUE MOST IN MY LIFE. SO IF YOU REALLY HAVE MY INTEREST AT HEART PROMISE ME THAT YOU WILL KEEP THE SECRET OF MY BIRTH TILL I DIE.
I WILL!


WHEN KUNTI HEARD THAT KRISHNA'S TALKS HAD FAILED, SHE WAS FULL OF GRIEF.
I MUST NOW TELL KARNA WHO HE IS. THE WAR MAY YET BE AVERTED.


SHE WENT TO KARNA WHEN HE WAS AT THE END OF HIS MIDDAY PRAYERS.
MY MOTHER! HERE! WHAT CAN SHE WANT?
WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU. O QUEEN?


SHE TOO RELATED TO KARNA THE STORY OF HIS BIRTH AND PLEADED WITH HIM NOT TO FIGHT HIS BROTHERS.
SEE, EVEN LORD SURYA, YOUR FATHER, JOINS ME IN MY REQUEST.
MOTHER, WHAT YOU ASK ME TO DO IS AGAINST MY DHARMA.


BUT HE WOULD NOT LET HIS MOTHER'S PLEAS GO IN VAIN.
I WILL FIGHT AGAINST YOUR SONS, MY BROTHERS, BUT I WILL NOT KILL ANY EXCEPT ARJUNA. YOU SHALL STILL HAVE FIVE SONS ALIVE AND I MY HONOUR.


KUNTI BLESSED KARNA AND LEFT HIM WITH MIXED FEELINGS.


BHEESHMA WAS TO LEAD THE KAURAVA ARMY. WHEN KARNA HEARD THAT, HE WENT TO DURYODHANA.
BHEESHMA HAS NEVER LIKED ME, AND I WILL NOT TAKE ORDERS FROM HIM. I WILL ENTER THE FIELD ONLY WHEN HE HAS FALLEN.

AND SO THE BATTLE OF KURUKSHETRA BECAME A REALITY. IT LASTED FOR 18 LONG DAYS. MANY VALIANT MEN WERE LOST ON EITHER SIDE. THE VENERABLE COMMANDER BHEESHMA, OF THE KAURAVA ARMIES, FELL ON THE TENTH DAY. HE FELL ON A BED OF ARROWS - STICKING OUT FROM HIS OWN ARMOUR. KARNA HAD ALWAYS LONGED FOR THE GRANDSIRE'S LOVE. WHEN HE HEARD THAT HE LAY WOUNDED, KARNA RUSHED TO THE SPOT.




DEAR KARNA ! I KNEW WHO YOU WERE. YOUR FIRM LOYALTY TO DURYODHANA IS YOUR CHOSEN DHARMA. MAY YOU LEAD HIS FORCES TO VICTORY ! GO FIGHT YOUR FATED ENEMIES.


IN A HURRIED COUNCIL, IT WAS DECIDED THAT DRONA SHOULD NOW COMMAND THE KAURAVA FORCES.
I DID HOPE THAT YOU WOULD LEAD US, KARNA.


IT IS BEST THAT DRONA LEAD US. LET THERE BE NO JEALOUSY AMONG OUR HEROES AT THIS STAGE.

AND SO THE BATTLE RAGED ON. IT WAS THE FOURTEENTH DAY. KARNA WAS ENGAGED IN FIGHTING BHEEMA. KARNA COULD EASILY HAVE KILLED HIM. BUT —





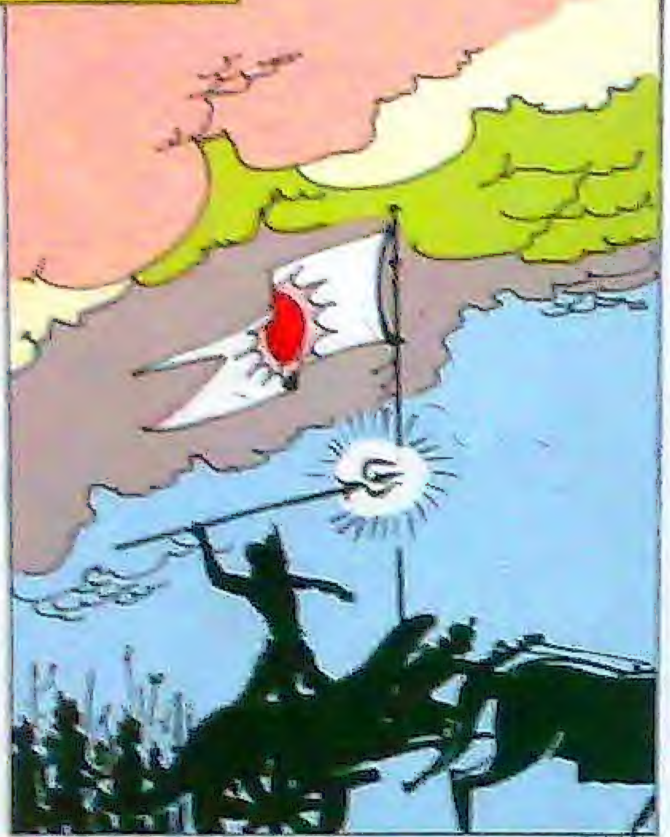
THAT DAY THE BATTLE CONTINUED INTO THE NIGHT. THIS WAS LUCKY FOR BHEEMA'S SON GHATOTKACHA AND HIS RAKSHASA FORCES, FOR RAKSHASAS ARE STRONG-EST AT NIGHT.





THE ILL-FATED KARNA, IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE, FORGOT HIMSELF AND USED THE INFALLIBLE SHAKTI- THE WEAPON OF INDRA.





ONCE MORE THE GODS HAD SMILED ON THE FAVOURED ARJUNA.



ALAS! I HAVE KILLED GHATOTKACHA BUT I HAVE LOST THE MIGHTIEST WEAPON SHAKTI WHICH I HAD MEANT TO USE ON ARJUNA.




ON THE FIFTEENTH DAY OF THE BATTLE, DRONA WAS SLAIN AND THE KAURAVA HEROES SPOKE AS ONE IN FAVOUR OF KARNA AS THEIR NEXT COMMANDER.
THE INDESTRUCTIBLE KARNA SHALL BE THE COMMANDER OF OUR FORCES.


DURYODHANA WAS PLEASED.
KARNA, YOU HATE THE PANDAVAS AS MUCH AS I DO. I AM SURE OF OUR VICTORY NOW.


KARNA WAS GLAD THAT HE COULD AT LAST REPAY HIS BELOVED KING.
I WILL LEAD OUR FORCES TO VICTORY, MY KING! ARJUNA SHALL DIE AT MY HANDS.


AND THUS KARNA ASSUMED COMMAND OF THE KAURAVA FORCES. THAT DAY HE HAD NAKULA AT HIS MERCY.


MY CHILD, BE PROUD THAT YOU FOUGHT A DUEL WITH KARNA. NOW GO HOME TO ARJUNA AND TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF.


I WOULD RATHER HE KILLED ME. OH THE SHAME OF IT!


ONE MORE DAY HAS PASSED AND ARJUNA STILL LIVES.
IT IS THE SKILL OF KRISHNA, HIS CHARIOTEER, THAT KEEPS HIM ALIVE. IF ONLY YOU COULD CONVINCE SHALYA TO BE MY CHARIOTEER, VICTORY WILL BE OURS.
IT SHALL BE DONE!



HE TOSSED ABOUT RESTLESSLY. IT WAS A DIFFICULT NIGHT FOR HIM.

TOMORROW I WILL TRY TO FIGHT AND SPARE YUDHISHTHIRA TOO. MOTHER KUNTI MUST KNOW HOW I KEPT MY PROMISE.



THE NEXT DAY KARNA HAD HIS WISH TO ENGAGE YUDHISHTHIRA IN SINGLE COMBAT.

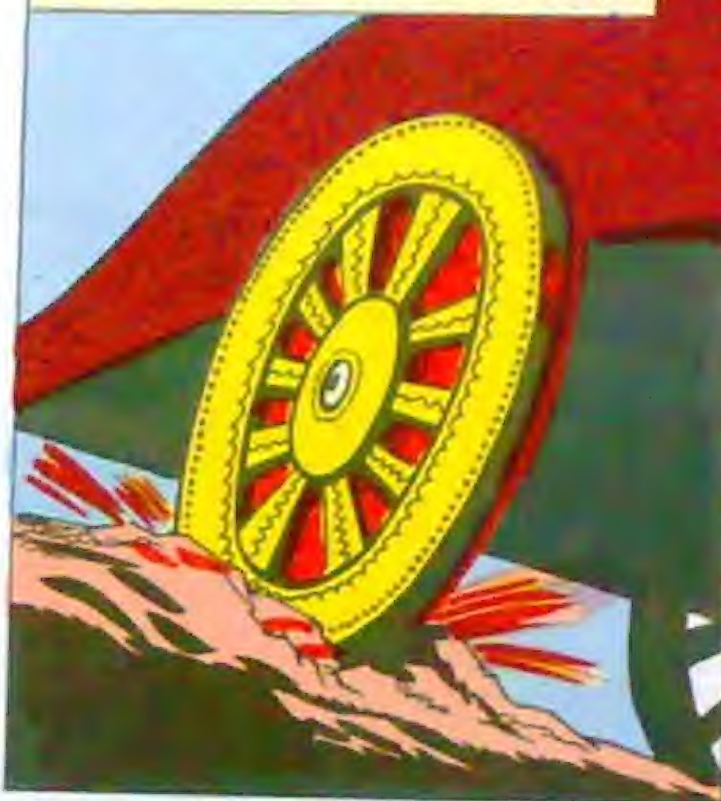
ARJUNA SHALL AVENGE ME.

I SPARE YOUR LIFE, YUDHISHTHIRA. YOU CAN NEVER KILL ME IN SINGLE COMBAT. LEAVE YOUR SUPERIORS TO THEIR EQUALS.

WHEN ARJUNA HEARD OF YUDHISHTHIRA'S HUMILIATION, HE COULD NOT WAIT TO ATTACK KARNA. HE SOON HAD THE CHANCE.









WHILE HE JUMPED DOWN AND TRIED TO DRAG IT OUT, ARJUNA WAS AT AN ADVANTAGE. PARASHURAMA'S CURSE HAD TAKEN EFFECT.

WHEN KARNA WAS THUS HELPLESS, ARJUNA, WITH KRISHNA'S PROMPTING ....

.... SHOT AN ARROW THAT SEVERED THE HEAD OF THE GREAT HERO FROM ITS BEAUTIFUL BODY.





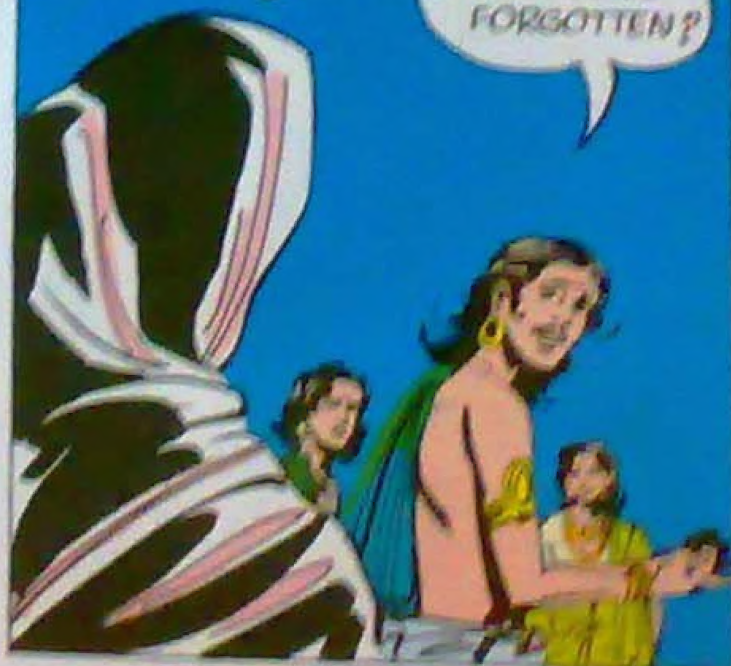
WHEN KUNTI HEARD OF KARNA'S DEATH —



AFTER THE BATTLE, THE VICTORIOUS PANDAVAS PERFORMED THE DEATH CEREMONIES FOR THE DEAD.



JUST AS YUDHISHTHIRA HAD ENDED WITH THE LAST OFFERING TO THEIR KINSMEN —

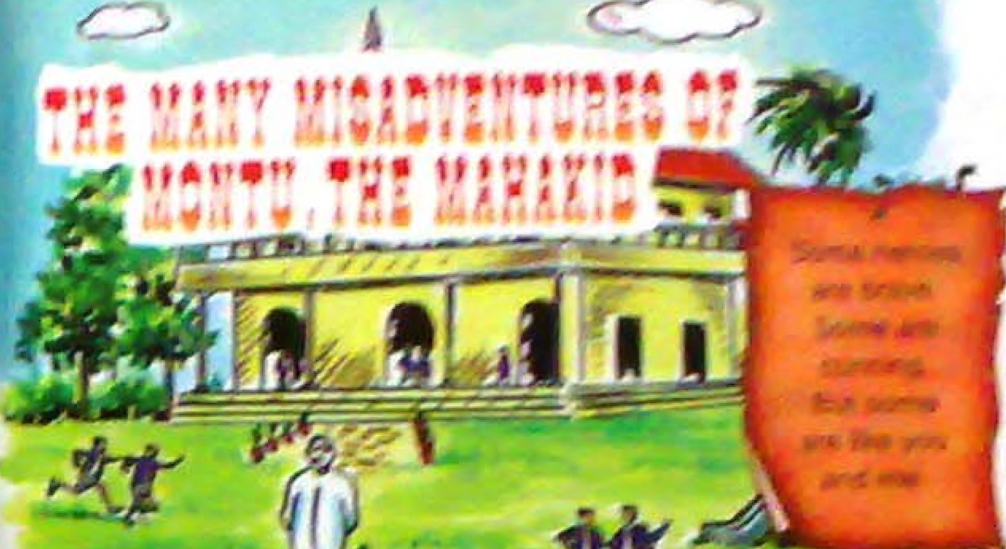






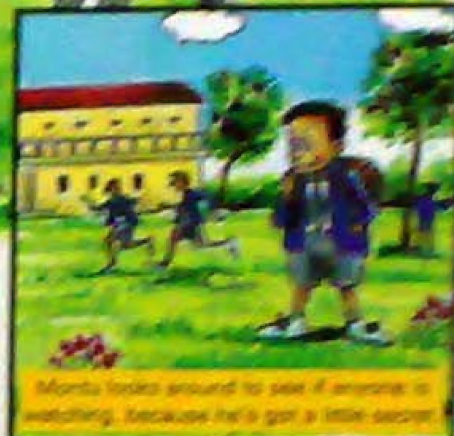


THUS KARNA WHO HAD LONGED FOR LOVE, RECOGNITION AND A GOOD NAME, WHILE HE LIVED, SECURED THESE, LIKE MANY GREAT MEN AFTER HIM, ONLY BY HIS DEATH.

















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